

CASE STUDY 30 Nov 20

## DEUXMOI: COLLECTIVE TRUTH VIA CELEBRITY GOSSIP

A real-life 'Gossip Girl' is 'spilling the tea' on celebrities with the help of its 430K+ followers. Born out of lockdown boredom, the @Deuxmoi Instagram account is offering a distraction from the seriousness of 2020, appealing to our base desire to get the scoop, even in the midst of a pandemic.

Location [United States](#)

### Featured Experts

#### Frank McAndrew

Frank McAndrew is the Cornelia H. Dudley Professor of Psychology at Knox College in Illinois and an elected fellow of several professional societies. Professor McAndrew is an evolutionary social psychologist best known for his work on gossip, creepiness, and environmental psychology, and over the course of his career, his research has been featured in more than one thousand media outlets. McAndrew is a blogger for Psychology Today Magazine, and he has also written for a range of other publications including The Guardian, CNN, Time Magazine, The Washington Post, and Scientific American.

### Author

#### Margot Peppers

Margot Peppers is the insights editor at Canvas8, which specialises in behavioural insights and consumer research. Her background is in journalism and copywriting, and she's written for publications and brands in the US and UK. Outside of work you'll find her either writing poetry, spoiling her cat, or playing board games like there's no tomorrow.

### Highlights & Data

- Deuxmoi crowdsources celebrity news, stories, and sightings via Instagram DMs and shares screenshots of the messages on Instagram Stories
- In the pandemic, people are increasingly holding famous people to account for their bad behavior
- Indulging in gossip is giving people a low-stakes escape from pandemic doomscrolling
- **53%** of Americans claim the internet has been essential during the pandemic ([Pew Research, 2020](#))
- **72%** of internet users aged 16 to 24 use social media to keep up with celebrities ([Statista, 2018](#))
- Social media usage accounted for **24.1%** of all mobile app use in March, when statewide stay-at-home orders were issued ([Axios, 2020](#))

## Scope

How does Chris Evans order a ham sandwich? And which unlikely famous people dine together? It's hardly groundbreaking intel, but these are the sorts of mundane celebrity revelations that have been occupying the minds of thousands of Instagram users in 2020 - in the middle of a global pandemic, a contentious election year, and a national reckoning around racism. The Instagram account [@Deuxmoi](#), run by self-styled 'curators of pop culture,' has racked up 430K+ followers, rivalling [In Touch Weekly](#), even though it remains a private, unverified account. How has it caused such a stir, and why now?

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Launched as a lifestyle website in 2013, Deuxmoi was revamped as a celebrity 'gossip girl' in April 2020 after its anonymous administrator, self-isolating and bored, asked her followers for scoops. "One day I sort of said, 'Why don't you guys write in to me any experiences you've had with celebrities,'" the woman behind the account told *PAPER*. "That's what started it all, and from there it snowballed." [1] On any given day, Deuxmoi will add 50+ screenshots of DMs sent in by followers to Instagram Stories, offering a constantly-updated snapshot of celebrity worlds before the content disappears after 24 hours. The actual account page is noticeably scant, leaving followers hungry for their daily fleeting news brief. Loyal readers head to reddit to break down the best rumors, and they're also privy to an entire lexicon: people send in 'tea', request a 'bump' to the top of the list, ask for incriminating tips to be 'blind', and use nicknames for recurring stars like 'Rude Ross' (David Schwimmer) and 'Headphones Dinobones' (Leonardo diCaprio). [2]

Aside from unearthing the occasional cheating scandal or unusual fetish, Deuxmoi stories are more everyday than hard-hitting, often puzzling out how 'nice' or not celebrities are based on unfiltered moments with fans. It's about holding famous figures to account, but without the hard edge and vengeful call to arms that often comes with 'calling out'. By focusing on the small stuff, Deuxmoi acts as a 'Cancel Culture Lite', relieving people of the heaviness of 2020. "Somebody's going to message me and say like, so-and-so was caught doing drugs at a party or having a threesome or whatever. It's just not as exciting as it sounds anymore," Deuxmoi told the *New York Times*. "I don't know, maybe it's the state of the world." [3]

Deuxmoi acts as a 'Cancel Culture Lite'

@deuxmoi | Instagram (2020) ©

### Context

In 2020, people have been glued to their phones to stay up-to-date with rapidly unfolding events. In fact, 53% of Americans claim the internet has been essential during the pandemic and at the beginning of lockdown, news consumption jumped as people sought to understand the virus and its implications. [4][5] Social media has been a big player in this space, its usage accounting for 24.1% of all mobile app use in March 2020 (up from 20.8% in January), when statewide stay-at-home orders were issued. [6]

But 'doomscrolling' has had a negative impact on mental health, leading to peak anxiety levels, especially among young people. [7] Unsurprisingly, as the pandemic rages on, people are increasingly veering away from the negative, swapping hard news for more uplifting, lighthearted stuff, with Instagram accounts like [@TanksGoodNews](#) and [@GoodNews\\_Movement](#) experiencing spikes in followers. Amid rising pandemic fatigue, and with a late-April poll finding that 44% of Americans were talking about coronavirus most or almost all of the time, it's clear there's a desire for non-COVID-related talking points. [8]

To call Deuxmoi 'uplifting', though, would be a stretch. It's straight-up gossip which, crucially, is hard to come by organically when much of life is lived at home. But there's certainly an appetite for it. "It's a diversion," says Frank McAndrew, a social psychologist at Knox College in Illinois. "If you're working at home, you're on a screen anyway and it's easy to click a link and distract yourself." [18] For young people, gossip is largely found online: 72% of internet users aged 16 to 24 use social media to keep up with celebrities. [9] [The Shade Room](#) Instagram account, for example, offers 24-hour, highly visual tidbits targeted specifically at young Black audiences, while YouTuber Keemstar, who runs the channel [DramaAlert](#), has been met with both praise and controversy for his sarcastic reporting on 'news' in the online community.

72% of internet users aged 16 to 24 use social media to keep up with celebrities

@deuxmoi | Instagram (2020) ©

## Insights and opportunities

### Making sense of the world, together

With its crowdsourced approach to information-gathering, Deuxmoi encourages followers to collectively piece together the truth. After one person cites bad behavior from a star, dozens more will write in to confirm or deny, creating a community working towards a common goal. Like the boom in shared entertainment platforms such as [Netflix Party](#) and [Twitch](#), the popularity of Deuxmoi reflects a move toward more interactive, community-focused screen time. It's also a way to connect with people. "Celebrities are a segue for us to have something to communicate with others about," says McAndrew. "I think of them as 'friends in law'. They're people that we all sort of know." Realizing that you've shared a similar celeb experience with a stranger can also be validating, appealing to the 57% of social media users in the US and UK who have used the platforms to stave off pandemic loneliness. [10]

### Be in the room where it happens

That Deuxmoi tidbits are only temporarily visible is no coincidence. "It builds urgency," says McAndrew, "because you're going to be out of the loop if you miss a day. You won't know what went on." [18] This transience mirrors how IRL gossip works, fostering an exclusive environment where you have to be 'in the room' to get the scoop. With WFH likely to stick for many people, they'll be looking for digital interactions that feel more realistic to actual conversations - which is perhaps why Slack, Twitter, and LinkedIn have all added Stories-inspired features in 2020. [11][12][13]

### Pure escapism

Deuxmoi's posts aren't 100% reliable, but this is part of its appeal. In an era when people see 'fake news' as a threat to the very existence of democracy, there's a catharsis that comes from revelling in speculative information that doesn't have major real-world implications. [14][15] Considering that 72% of Gen Zers say memes and humorous posts make them feel capable of getting through the pandemic, it makes sense that Deuxmoi's playful, irreverent content is resonating. [16] And while the goal isn't to 'cancel' anyone, if a star happens to get their comeuppance, so be it. "I try to remind everyone that my account is 'for entertainment purposes only'," Deuxmoi told the *Daily Beast*. "If something good comes out of it, great, but I'm not trying to crusade against anything." [17]

## Sources

1. *Paper Magazine* (August 2020)
2. *Reddit* (June 2020)
3. *The New York Times* (November 2020)
4. *Pew Research* (April 2020)
5. *Vox* (March 2020)
6. *Axios* (April 2020)
7. *Psychology Today* (September 2020)
8. *Pew Research* (May 2020)
9. *Statista* (July 2019)
10. *Mobile Marketer* (June 2020)
11. *The Verge* (October 2020)
12. *Twitter* (November 2020)
13. *The Drum* (October 2020)
14. *Pew Research* (June 2019)
15. *Wall Street Journal* (October 2020)
16. *Vice Media* (April 2020)
17. *Daily Beast* (September 2020)
18. Interview with Frank McAndrew, conducted by the author

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### CONTACT

Lucy Thompson, Senior Memberships  
Manager  
[+44 \(0\)20 7377 8585](tel:+442073778585)  
[lucy@canvas8.com](mailto:lucy@canvas8.com)

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### CONTACT

Sam Shaw, Strategy Director  
[+44 \(0\)20 7377 8585](tel:+442073778585)  
[sam@canvas8.com](mailto:sam@canvas8.com)